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ABSTRACT

The Kamehameha Early Education Program (KEEP) is a research and development program designed to develop, demonstrate, and disseminate methods for improving the education of Hawaiian and part-Hawaiian children; this report contains a description of the reading curriculum used in the KEEP demonstration school during the 1975-76 school year. The report begins with a description of the structure of the curriculum, and then presents a grade-by-grade analysis of the curriculum content. The final section of the report presents an overview of research findings and of ideas that are reflected in the curriculum. (FL)

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Technical Report #43

Description of the KEEP Reading Curriculum, 1975-76

Kathryn H. Au
The Kamehameha Early Education Program

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The Kamehameha Early Education Program

The Kamehameha Early Education Program (KEEP) is a research and development program of The Kamehameha Schools/Bernice P. Bishop Estate. The mission of KEEP is the development, demonstration, and dissemination of methods for improving the education of Hawaiian and Part-Hawaiian children. These activities are conducted at the Ka Na'i Pono Research and Demonstration School, and in public classrooms in cooperation with the State Department of Education. KEEP projects and activities involve many aspects of the educational process, including teacher training, curriculum development, and child motivation, language, and cognition. More detailed descriptions of KEEP's history and operations are presented in Technical Reports #1-4.

Technical Report #43

Description of KEEP Reading Curriculum: 1975-76*

Kathryn H. Au

This report describes the reading curriculum which is being used in the Kamehameha Early Education Program (KEEP) demonstration school during the 1975-1976 school year. This curriculum, while still in the process of development and far from providing the final answer, reflects some of the current thinking of the KEEP teaching and research staff about content and methods for promoting reading achievement in children from backgrounds comparable to the KEEP students. The description of the reading curriculum will be presented in three parts: 1) the structure of the curriculum; 2) its content; and 3) an overview of the research findings and ideas that are reflected in it.

Structure

The reading curriculum is characterized by a system of minimum objectives. These objectives define the lowest level of achievement which the student is expected to meet in order to fall within the range of academic performance expected for a child of his age and grade.

There are nine data points, one at the end of each four week period of the school year. Students are tested at each data point to see if they meet the minimum objectives in reading achievement set at that point for their grade level. A complete system of minimum objectives and data point tests has been developed for kindergarten through third grade. The sequence of objectives is planned so that a child meeting all the minimum objectives should test at or near grade level at the end of each grade.

The minimum objective system makes possible early identification of children who are having difficulty learning to read. Extra help can be given

* Thanks to Mele Ah Ho for her assistance in preparing this report and to Doris Crowell for her comments and insights in editing it.

immediately to individual children. Monthly testing calls attention to the need for follow up in these target cases. The minimum objective system also gives the teacher a quick picture of the achievement level of each child in the class and of the class as a group month by month. Children who are well ahead or below the minimum level are tested at the level at which they are performing.

In addition to the minimum objectives, the reading curriculum includes enablers, or specific teaching techniques, that may be used to help children meet the objectives. Additional enablers will be suggested throughout the year as teachers acquire new ways of teaching certain skills. The enablers should also prove useful in generating ideas for reading research at the level of classroom instruction. For example, a teacher may find one method of teaching new sight words to be more effective than another. Her hypothesis about the effectiveness of that particular method could be tested in a study, which would provide practical information immediately applicable to the classroom. Teachers may express preference for certain enablers also, that is, one method will work better for some teachers than for others. The selection of the most effective enablers from those already available and the development of new enablers to meet individual teacher's preferences will be a continuing process.

Content

Within the reading curriculum, three different strands of objectives are continued throughout the grades. The first is a comprehension strand which includes the ability to answer questions verbally or in written form, the use of syntactic and semantic cues to guess an unknown word, and other skills involving understanding of the text. The second strand deals with decoding, and encompasses objectives covering the learning of sound-symbol relationships (phonics), parts of words such as word endings, and word form analysis. The third strand lists objectives that have to do with the development of the

child's sight vocabulary. The addition of two other strands, cognitive operations and functional language, is also planned.

A description of the content included within each grade level follows.

Kindergarten

The program calls for approximately two months of readiness activities, most of which would be included in any conventional kindergarten program to help the children develop socialization skills and learn school routines. During this period, the behaviors stressed are those which seem necessary for a child to participate in a formal reading (or any other academic) class with the least amount of difficulty. The development of attentional, self-care, and social behaviors are considered as important at this stage as the learning of traditional academic skills, such as copying. After acquiring these behaviors, the child should be able to complete some short assignments independently, with the complexity of these assignments increasing and the need for teacher supervision decreasing over time.

Actual reading instruction for most children begins during the second or third month of kindergarten. The children first learn some sight vocabulary through a language experience approach. After a small number of words have been learned, phonics instruction, or the learning of sound-symbol relationships, is begun. In addition, for the comprehension strand, the children would receive practice with oral cloze procedures, and retell events in stories read to them by the teacher. The minimum objective system calls for most children to have learned all 20 initial consonant sounds by data point 3. After this, they learn letter names and the sequence of letters in the alphabet. Most children begin work in some kind of basal text around data point 4. The development of sight vocabulary is continued in this way, so that most children have a sight vocabulary of at least 50 words by the end of the school year (data point 9).

First Grade

In the comprehension strand, the children are taught to guess missing words in simple sentences when given the initial consonant of that word. They also learn to read and discuss short stories and to answer questions orally or in writing.

In the decoding strand, the first month of the school year is spent reviewing the different initial consonant sounds. This strand continues with the introduction of these same consonant sounds in the final position during the second month, and the children also learn to determine whether a specified sound occurred in the initial, medial, or final position in a given word. During instruction periods 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7, the emphasis is on learning short and long vowel sounds, and learning to decode words with different graphemic bases, such as those ending in -ill. Clusters and digraphs would be introduced at the end of the year.

In the development of sight vocabulary, the children are constantly adding new words at the rate of 10 or more per month, so that by the end of the year 162 words are in their sight vocabulary. This number does not include decodable words, that is, words ending in graphemic bases they have learned.

Second Grade

In the comprehension strand, practice on recall of specific facts and details, as well as identifying the main ideas and sequence of events in a story, is included.

In the decoding strand, the children learn to count the number of syllables in a given word, and are introduced to compound words, additional verb correspondences, contractions, and more graphemic bases. They also learn about correspondences such as /u/oo; verb endings, such as ing; suffixes, such as -er;

changes that go along with adding suffixes, such as the doubling of the consonant in putting; and spelling patterns.

In the sight vocabulary strand, the children should be able to read 336 words by sight at the end of data point 3, and 619 words by sight at the end of data point 7. By the second grade, sight vocabulary is checked by data point tests only occasionally, and the children are learning a number of new words, approximately 75 a month. Because of the large number of sight words that most children at this stage of reading achievement are able to learn, it is far too time consuming, as well as unnecessary, to test the children on every new sight word that has been presented. Rather, testing is done on a sample of new words presented and on a bi-monthly basis. Also, many of the new sight words are used in stories designed to test comprehension skills, and children who do not know these new words are targeted through their performance on these tests.

Third Grade

In the comprehension strand, the children continue to work on sequence and facts in a story, and also learn to predict outcomes and to draw their own conclusions. In addition, some skimming is practiced at the end of third grade.

The children continue to learn new graphemic bases, generalizations, more prefixes and suffixes and vowel correspondences in the decoding strand. They receive additional work in syllabication, and learn about changing y when a noun is made plural.

The sight vocabulary strand reflects the large number of new words that are continuously being added. The children are to have sight vocabularies of 1,239 words by data point 2, 1,945 words by the end of data point 6, and 2,579 words by the end of data point 9 (completion of the third grade).

Planned additions to the present minimum objective system

Although most reading programs place a heavy emphasis on decoding, the importance of skills in other areas is increasingly recognized. Among these are

skills in cognitive operations and functional communication, two other strands which will be added to the present minimum objective system. The cognitive operations strand will include objectives dealing with "how to think about things," designed to teach the child systematic and logical ways to proceed when he is faced with various tasks. This strand will also incorporate labeling, matching, sorting, seriation, auditory memory, discrimination, problem solving, and creative thinking. The functional communication strand will include a variety of oral language skills.

Research

More than anything else, the new reading curriculum recognizes the complexity of the task of learning to read. The child needs to acquire many different kinds of skills, and to learn to apply these skills simultaneously in the act of reading. Thus, the three strands of the curriculum--comprehension, sight vocabulary, and decoding--begin in the kindergarten and continue through the third grade, with emphasis on comprehension skills increasing while emphasis on decoding is decreasing. Each strand contains important and necessary skills which are not easily learned by the KEEP students (see Technical Report #26), and thus should be specifically taught.

The main difference between this curriculum and most others is its early and continuing stress on comprehension skills. Comprehension, in this case, refers broadly to the ability to deal with verbal material of all kinds, whether it be instructions, a story read by the teacher, or information on a printed page. It includes the ability to communicate one's understanding either verbally or in writing. These skills are first developed at the oral level with pictures while the child is developing a basic sight vocabulary and decoding skills. Later, the same skills and others are practiced with information gained by the child in reading. While no strict hierarchy of comprehension skills is proposed, certain assumptions have been made. For example, it is assumed that the child will

need to be able to recall a number of facts about a story before he can make predictions about how a story will end.

Concerted attempts to investigate ways of promoting reading achievement in the KEEP students have proceeded along three different lines: language studies, motivational studies, and decoding. These studies have yielded many interesting findings, but few have provided clear guidance for curriculum issues in the average classroom setting.

Language studies constituted one major area of investigation. Most of the KEEP students are speakers of Hawaii-Creole, and it seemed likely that they would be handicapped in learning to read because of interference between the two dialects. Their texts are in Standard English and their teachers speak to them in Standard English during classes. Quite to the contrary, findings to date indicate no interference in the reading process which can be attributed to dialect interferences. The children apparently can discriminate sounds used in Standard English, even if these same discriminations are not appparent in their own speech. There also seems to be no loss in the understanding of connected discourse, because the children are able to answer questions about stories read to them in Standard English as well as they are able to answer questions about stories in Hawaii-Creole.

Investigation of motivational variables has constituted another major area of research. At KEEP, motivation has been defined operationally in terms of an on-task measure, or the amount of time a child is paying attention to the teacher or doing his assigned work (see Technical Reports #6 and #24). It has been assumed that a highly motivated child will be very attentive while a poorly motivated child will show much off-task behavior, such as wandering around the room or daydreaming. Our conclusion has been that while high motivation, as manifested by a high rate of on-task behavior, was necessary for learning, the manipulation of motivational variables is not sufficient in itself to promote

learning to read. That is, the children probably learned much more than they would have without special motivational techniques, but still far less than it was believed possible for them to learn.

Research into more efficient ways of teaching decoding skills, in particular, sound-symbol correspondences, led to the investigation of different variables considered important in the field of verbal learning. These included the order in which letters were presented for learning, whether serially or randomly; and the spacing of practice, intensive training in a single day or training spaced over several days. The differences produced by these variables did not seem significant at the level of classroom instruction.

These investigations into language, motivational, and verbal learning variables were all based on ideas from existing research literature, these ideas having been judged relevant through observations of the KEEP students and the types of difficulties they experienced in the classroom. The present minimum objective system represents an attempt to turn this strategy around by looking for solutions in the classroom itself, rather than outside of it. The value of developing lines of research that grow out of successful classroom practices is seen in the way enablers are set up within the curriculum. These are to be tried, supplemented, discarded, and new ones added, in a process of continuing development. The reading curriculum thus reflects the belief that our efforts in reading research and classroom practice should be closely related, each area benefiting from growth in the other.